

Time Out

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Loretta Lux

★★★★

Yossi Milo Gallery, through Sat 17
(see Chelsea)

What subject could be more saccharine than children, altered to look like little angels? In her digital photographs, Loretta Lux nips and tucks her way to cuter versions of already cute kids, while tenderly exaggerating the eccentricities of others. Her photographs may be distant artistic cousins to flea market paintings of wide-eyed children with tears glistening in their eyes, but her subtle manipulations give her works an unsettling, alien quality that rescues them from kitsch.

Each image toys with viewers' expectations about truth in photography. The show's most stunning beauty—a curly blond drummer boy with ramrod-straight posture and intense blue eyes—is so artificially charming as to look like an experiment in genetic engineering. In the most ambiguous image—identical twins, one healthy and the other sickly—it is impossible to differentiate nature's happenstance from Lux's intervention.

The overriding quality of Lux's characters is their appeal. The artist goes to great lengths to ingratiate her subjects with her audience, eliciting sympathy for urchins in filthy clothes (pulling a *Les Miz*) and evoking nostalgic pastimes such as playing marbles or flying a paper airplane. But even the most off-kilter character, a skinny girl with clasped hands and a creepy Mother Teresa look of calm benevolence, is only moderately disturbing. Lux is obviously interested in the oddities she can both find and create in human beings, but her approach shies away from the grotesque while embracing the surreal.

—Merrily Kerr

The Drummer

